

red Republican States: Utah; Georgia; South Dakota; Idaho; Iowa; and, most recently, Nebraska, where the legislature overrode the Governor's veto to raise their gas tax.

It is time for Congress to do its job and to be in partnership with those States who expect us to maintain the Federal responsibility. Let's hear from the broad array of people and then allow the Ways and Means Committee to follow regular order.

There is more support for raising the gas tax. The public is already paying the price. The bill I have, which would provide 210 billion additional dollars over the next decade, would cost the average motorist just about \$90 a year. At a time of declining gas prices, that is not that great, but motorists are now paying \$350 a year on average in damage to their cars. The country paid \$125 billion in the cost of congestion.

Let's stop beating around the bush. Let's pass the first 6-year transportation reauthorization, the first since 1998. The first step is for the Ways and Means Committee to do its job, bring these people in, work together on a bipartisan basis, raise the gas tax, index the gas tax, then abolish the gas tax, replace it with something that is sustainable.

In the meantime, let's rebuild and renew America and put hundreds of thousands of people to work at family-wage jobs while we strengthen communities from coast to coast.

HOLDING THE VA ACCOUNTABLE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN) for 5 minutes.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to talk about our veterans.

Memorial Day was just this past weekend, and we honored those who paid the ultimate sacrifice in defense of our Nation.

This weekend also, veterans from around our great country journeyed here to our Nation's Capital to visit the monuments that were publicly erected in their honor. I am so proud that a group of over 60 veterans living in south Florida—including David Millan, Don Lowe, and Augustine Fernandez—were able to make the trip on the first-ever Honor Flight from Miami International Airport, located in my congressional district.

They, like all veterans, are true American patriots, courageous and brave, putting others before themselves, willing to stand up and fight for our Nation's ideals and for the spread of freedom, peace, and prosperity abroad. That is who they are. It is in their DNA.

My family and I, we know the sacrifice and the courage and the resolve that is required to dedicate one's life to the service of our country. My husband, Dexter, proudly served in Vietnam as a U.S. Army Ranger, earning a Purple Heart. My stepson, Douglas, and

his wife, Lindsay, both served tours of duty as Active Duty Marine Corps aviators in Iraq, with Lindsay also having served in Afghanistan. They are still serving our Nation as Marine reservists.

I could not be prouder of them and their fellow veterans and have the highest respect for the families and caregivers who support our vets after they return home from their missions. I recognize that we can never repay our veterans in full for their contributions, but we must certainly try. I would like to think that all Americans feel the same way.

A key part of our Nation's commitment to our veterans has always been providing them with quality health care, especially with respect to injuries suffered in the line of duty; but, more than a year after the most recent VA health system scandal rocked this administration and forced the replacement of a Cabinet Secretary, the VA's commitment on health care continues to fall tragically short.

A year later, the number of patients facing long wait times is still the same, and somehow, the number of patients waiting more than 90 days has actually doubled. A year later, the VA health system continues to fail our veterans. We know that these veterans have the right stuff, the selflessness, the courage, and the pride that they demonstrate in defense of the American way of life; but what must they think of our government now?

Unconscionably long wait times, bureaucratic mismanagement, top-down rationed care are all well below the bare minimum standards any American should expect; yet this is exactly what the VA, under this administration, continues to offer our veterans.

At least this Congress has pushed for reform, for access, for choice. In the last year, we have passed laws that set out to improve access for veterans seeking medical care and mental health services. Congress also provided the VA with \$16 billion to shorten wait times and improve healthcare quality.

I have joined many of my colleagues to demand that the VA publicly release the findings of 140 internal healthcare investigations conducted since 2006 to enforce accountability at the VA. I have also joined a bipartisan contingent of my House colleagues to offer to help the VA staff focus on providing health care by allowing congressional staff to serve as the primary point of contact for veterans asking about their claims and their long appointment times.

Over and over again, Congress' efforts have been met by a stubborn bureaucracy that looks to skirt legislative intent on expanding veterans access and choice and reforming the way that the VA health system does its business.

I am committed to holding the VA under this administration responsible for the continued failings of our VA health system, and I will continue to

fight alongside my colleagues in Congress for the reforms that will provide our veterans with the quality health care they deserve.

We know that our veterans should not have to wait another year. The time is long past; the time is now. The next time that south Florida residents come to D.C. on Honor Flights to visit their war memorials, they will truly know that our Nation honors their service by providing quality health care at all of our VA facilities.

EXPORT-IMPORT BANK

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. HOYER) for 5 minutes.

Mr. HOYER. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleagues for allowing me to precede them.

I want to thank the gentlewoman from Florida. Of course, I am always glad to hear her speak on the floor. I wanted her to know that.

Mr. Speaker, we are now less than a month from the deadline for Congress to reauthorize the Export-Import Bank.

In 2012, this House came together under the leadership of the gentleman from Virginia, Mr. Cantor, who worked with my office, and we put a bill on the floor that reauthorized the Bank and increased its lending authority with a bipartisan vote of 330-93. This should not be and is not a partisan issue.

Helping small- and medium-sized American businesses access new overseas markets and compete on a level playing field is something that Democrats and Republicans have long agreed that Congress ought to do.

That is why it is deeply concerning to read comments from Majority Leader MCCARTHY that Congress should "wind down" the Bank and allow its charter to expire. That, in my view, is a minority opinion on the floor of this House, and that would be a profound mistake.

□ 1015

The Export-Import Bank is a critical tool that helps our businesses compete successfully in global markets. We are going to talk about trade, apparently, next week, but what we need to make sure is that we can export goods that are made in America, that we will make in America, and that we will sell abroad. The Export-Import Bank facilitates that effort. It is a critical tool that helps businesses compete successfully in global markets.

Last year alone, it supported \$27.5 billion in export activity. About 90 percent of its transactions support thousands of small businesses that otherwise would have difficulty accessing markets.

The Ex-Im Bank has supported 1.3 million private sector jobs since our economic recovery began, including 164,000 jobs just last year, and it does all this without costing the taxpayers